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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 001542

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/E AND PM; DOD FOR ISA AFRICA DAS THERESA  
WHELAN; CJTF-HOA FOR MARCENT COMMANDER AND CJTF-HOA  
COMMANDER GENERAL SAMUEL HELLAND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2014

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT GUELLEH ON CAMP LEMONIER ACCESS  
NEGOTIATIONS

REF: DJIBOUTI 1498

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARGUERITA D. RAGSDALE.  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Ambassador met with President Ismail Omar Guelleh December 2, at her request, to review progress in the U.S. bilateral relationship and to solicit the President's perspectives on regional developments. The meeting took place at the Presidential Palace. Ambassador and Guelleh were joined by Pol/Econ officer (notetaker for Embassy) and Minister of the Presidency Osman Ahmed (notetaker for Guelleh). During the discussions, Ambassador raised Camp Lemonier access/lease negotiations currently underway in Washington between the U.S. Department of Defense and Djibouti's ambassador, Roble Olhaye.
2. (C) Speaking in English, Guelleh responded that talks were proceeding slowly and that it had been difficult working with interlocutors at the Department of Defense. He said he did not understand why the Department of State and White House were not engaged in the negotiating process. The Department of Defense "lacks experience" and prefers to "impose demands" rather than negotiate. He concluded that the Department of Defense "had become so large" and "tentaculaire" (French, meaning tentacular, sprawling) "that it now wants to act fully independent of the State Department." Guelleh said he had asked Olhaye to seek a meeting with White House staff and State to make them aware of difficulties in negotiations, in order that they can assist should problems arise.
3. (C) Ambassador asked Guelleh if Olhaye had briefed him on the U.S. military's land requirements at Lemonier. She explained that the U.S. military was interested in use of all the territory extending from the existing Camp perimeter to and including the nearby island. Guelleh nodded that he was aware, and said "that's a lot of land." "We are ready to give you all the land you want," he added, "but you have to give us a place to go." Ambassador noted that Sultan Sulayem and Abdurrahman Boreh had put forward a proposal to her and General Helland, in a recent meeting (see refel), that the U.S. take over the existing Ambouli airport for military use and construct a new international airport elsewhere in exchange. She said the Sulayem/Boreh proposal initially had no clarification of a role for France, although the two subsequently suggested that France and the U.S. could share use of Ambouli. She asked Guelleh if he was aware of the proposal. He said he was aware of it and that he had also briefed Olhaye. He asked the Ambassador what the U.S. thought of the proposal.
4. (C) Ambassador replied that it was difficult for the U.S. to respond. She said Sulayem and Boreh are not members of the Government of Djibouti. If their proposal is a Government proposal, then he (Guelleh) might ask Ambassador Olhaye to raise it directly with Deputy Assistant Secretary Whelan. Guelleh responded that he did not wish to put the proposal on the table until he had some preliminary reaction from the U.S. If the U.S. were interested, Dubai Ports International (Sulayem's company) would be responsible for building a new terminal building and for extending and preparing the runway. The U.S. would be responsible for taxiways, aircraft parking areas, and the air traffic control tower. France would cover the rest of the airport infrastructure. Ambassador asked Guelleh if he thought France would/could finance construction of a new airport? Guelleh responded that he "would talk to them" and also that he was certain they would be willing to pay their share of costs. (Comment: It was clear to Ambassador that Guelleh was not prepared to raise it with the French until he had an indication of U.S. interest in the overall plan. End comment) Ambassador told Guelleh she would share his views with Washington.
5. (C) Guelleh went on to say that he wanted a single agreement to encompass all issues surrounding the U.S. lease of Lemonier. Ambassador explained that it would not be possible to combine the three into a single element, given the need for new negotiating authority, possibly under congressional mandate, were there to be a single agreement. Such a move would only further delay matters. Guelleh

appeared to understand, saying that "if it is the desire of our counterparts, we don't mind keeping those as three different ones." Ambassador recounted the three for information purposes, to which Guelleh responded that the "Acquisitions and Cross Services Agreement (ACSA)" was "the most important." He said the ACSA was "more profitable" for Djibouti. However, he continued, it is not being implemented "perhaps because of the laxity of Djibouti." Ambassador stated that the ACSA remains in force but that she understood Djibouti had not presented the necessary documentation to enable that payments be made. Guelleh admitted that this was a problem, saying "that is why I refer to our laxity." He did not say if there were immediate plans to address the issue.

16. (C) Comment: Guelleh is clearly ill-at-ease by what he sees as "slow" and "difficult" negotiations in Washington. Some of this concern may reflect the influence of Abdurrahman Boreh, who made a similar point recently to Ambassador. Guelleh and Boreh want to keep the U.S. military account in Djibouti. There is no doubt on this score. The proposal that the U.S. military join in an airport construction project in exchange for more land and benefits at Lemonier -- which Guelleh appears to support in principle -- is intriguing on the surface. How it would/could work in practice is another matter. Sulayem has estimated a total construction price tag of USD 100 million. If accurate, the U.S. share would be roughly a third -- not bad if the U.S. had a long-term lease and no other cost requirements under a new lease agreement. However, maintenance and preparation of Ambouli would need to be factored into the equation as well as whether a mechanism exists within Defense to accommodate such a scheme. For the new airport, would there be a fixed charge to each partner? Who would manage the project? How would cost overruns be handled? Guelleh implies that details such as these could be worked out IF the U.S. first expresses interest. Over to the Defense negotiating team. End comment.  
RAGSDALE